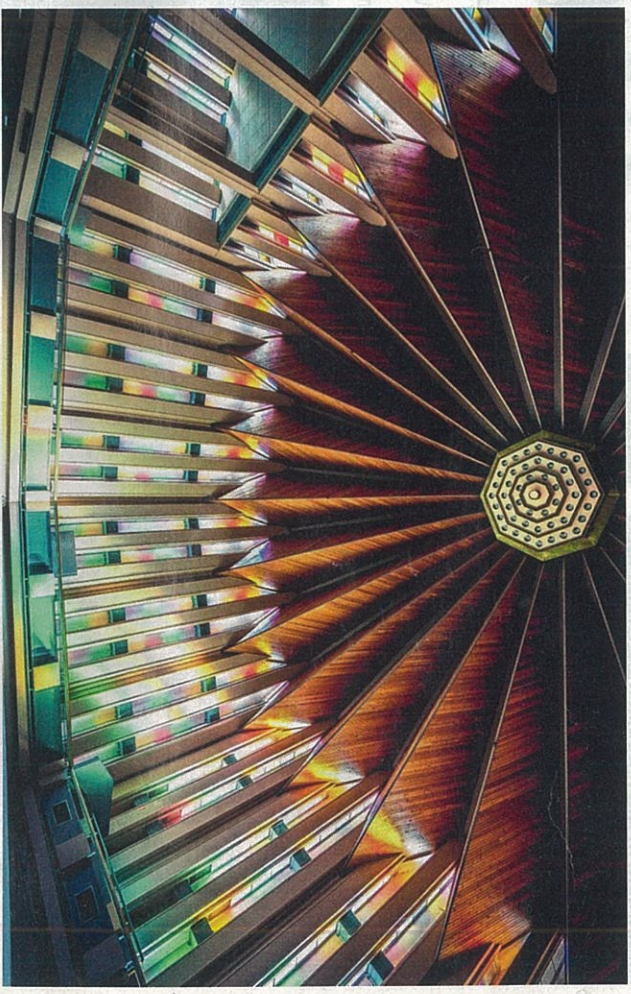




“It’s the rapid pace at which things change and the realisation of what’s being lost.”



“It’s the rapid pace at which things change and the realisation of what’s being lost. We used to make things. This place speaks of industry and things we used to do.”

But surely there’s a political dimension. Not just homes, but whole (poorly-managed) cities withering on the vine. Detroit, for instance, the “poster child for urban blight”. In 1950 the Motor City boasted a population of 1.85 million, and today, barely a third of that. Whole neighbourhoods sitting unused, as the jobs of the workers who used to live in them continue to evaporate like petrol on the pavement. High crime, urban decay. The first US city to declare itself bankrupt (although there are signs they are past the worst of it).

Is Adelaide destined to follow that path? “There’s a vision that’s been lost in the state,” McCarten says. “So many things have shut, closed down. The State Bank collapse was the start of that loss of optimism ...even losing the Grand Prix ... like we can’t keep anything anymore.”

I suggest, perhaps, he is the photographer of pessimism, but he hopes not. “Often when these places go there’s a feeling that

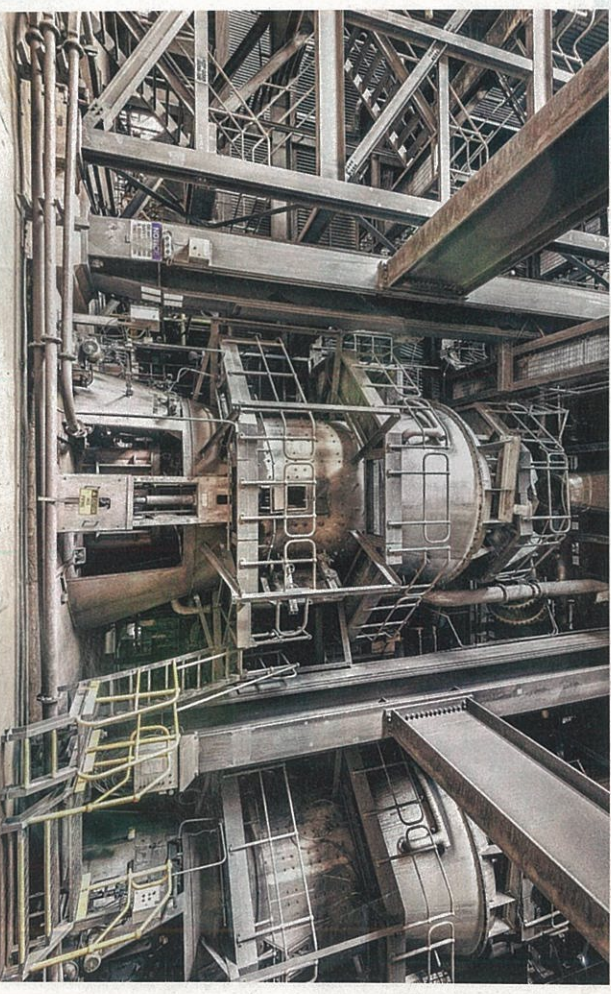
something bigger and better is coming.” In a way, he can’t afford to pass judgment. “I put the images up there and let others engage in debate. Partly, because I want to be able to gain access to other buildings ... I’d have doors slammed in my face.”

More stairs, as this modern Mawson leads the way, the eagerness to make new discoveries. I ask about his website. The many stories of South Australia gone to seed. Forgotten World War II radar stations, what’s left of HQ, Glenside Hospital, the Penrice Soda Factory and, my personal favourite, Storybook Cottage and the Whacky Wood. Photos of abandoned toys, the Snow Queen’s decree, a Chucky doll and papier mache Statue of Liberty.

So many small things from so many of our pasts, our childhoods, memories left to gather cobwebs. We feel uncomfortable that it’s come this. Bo Peep’s sheep, long gone, although if you listen you can still hear the voices of kids running around.

Like Lobethal’s Fairyland Village.

“That one had been around for a long time,” McCarten says.



Clockwise from left: Storybook Cottage, Tanunda (Picture: Scott McCarten); McCarten in an abandoned wool store (Picture: Tait Schnaai); The now demolished Maughan Church, Franklin St, Adelaide, and Northern Power Station at Port Augusta (Pictures: Scott McCarten)